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ABSTRACT

A policy is a general statement of intent to act in a particular manner when confronted with a given situation or to achieve a given result in the future. Because policies ensure consistency and fairness, policy making is the most important function assigned to a governing board. Policies are not only the vehicle by which a board expresses and maintains control, but also serve to inform the public about how the board is likely to dispose of issues related to personnel, instruction, student services, general administration, board-administrator relations, and other important issues. The development of well-defined policies requires discipline, considerable debate and discussion, and much time. Steps in policy development include the following: (1) identification of a need; (2) board instruction to the administration to research the area and report back; (3) preparation of a sample policy; (4) solicitation of input from faculty, students, and parents; (5) conduct of a public hearing for complex issues; (6) conduct of a special board meeting to consider the policy; (7) revision; and (8) adoption. After a policy is developed it should be disseminated to the public, implemented and enforced on campus, and continually evaluated, and if, necessary revised. If policies are to be a means by which the board can more effectively discharge its responsibilities, rather than a device that unduly restricts board deliberations, they must be flexible. (EJV)

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Organizational Policy: Where It Comes From, What It Does

by

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Big Spring, Texas

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Organizational Policy: Where It Comes From, What It Does

The success or failure of any college administrator may be directly linked to one's ability to follow, and interpret, the policies of an organization. Administrators do not have the luxury of "selecting" the policies they want to enforce, they are bound to uphold them all. If there are policies that are out-dated or are causing more problems than they solve, those policies should be changed or eliminated. Policy administration is a responsibility that must not be taken lightly. How they are interpreted sets precedents for future action and administrators must follow these precedents or appear "wishy washy" or discriminatory in the management of the college. A standard definition of "policy" may be needed as a point of reference:

Policy - A guide in the management of affairs: Management or procedure based primarily on material interest; a definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions; a high-level overall plan embracing the general goals and acceptable procedures of an organizational body.

For colleges and schools, the organization and approval of all policies comes from elected or appointed Board members. Yet few board members fully realize the importance of their role as policy makers. It is generally accepted that most Board members come from mid-America, the manager, housewife, farmer - generally they are people who are busy carrying out the policies made by others! Following their election or appointment, all-of-the-sudden they are now policy makers! It is a frustrating job and too many Board members side-step the responsibility by adopting policies developed by the administration without question!

However, the board member who becomes a skilled policy maker can be a great asset to the college and administration. Policy sets forth the Board's (and hopefully their constituents) ideas, beliefs and convictions. And then it lets the administration go to work! Policy is Power and those who make policy are truly in control. Policy communicates to the administration what the Board wants to achieve, then ideally leaves the administration free to put the policy to work.

Governing a college requires a wide range of policies. They need to cover:

1. Personnel
2. Instruction
3. Student Services
4. General Administration
5. Board-Administration Relations
6. Business Management
7. Facilities
8. Community Relations
9. Board Organization
10. Etc.

Some policy manuals will have over 1,000 items, dealing from the unimportant (who may possess keys) to the very important (the goals and objectives of the district). Policies can be negative, restrictive, or prohibitive, but basically policies should be procedural - spelling out ways to get things done! Some policies can be developed quickly - others may take years! They will come from many sources - state, federal, legal - but most importantly - local.

Policies can originate from a specific need or a casual comment. From a teacher who observes something that needs to be corrected, or, from parents, students, editorials - anything that can be identified by the eyes and ears of a Board member that has implications for the organization. When you are finished with a policy, it is soon time to revise it and bring it up to date! It is a lot of work, but the organizational policies are the framework of the college and they pay off in efficient organizational operations! (Brodinsky, 1977)

STEPS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A BOARD POLICY

1. Generally started with an idea or need.
2. Board instructs the administration to research the area, look at the literature, law, research, what other colleges are doing. Report back to them.
3. Write out a sample policy-or modify another college's policy in same area.
4. Obtain input from many sources-faculty, students, parents.
5. Complex issue might require a public hearing.
6. May need a special board meeting to deal only with the policy at hand.
7. Board members must put their knowledge and ideas (and those of the community) into action.
8. Then edit, revise, edit, revise until it is right.
9. Then adopt!

SHOULD WE STOP HERE? NO!

1. Inform, publicize, disseminate -- let the people of whom this policy will directly effect know about it. Pass out copies to be placed in Loose-Leaf policy manuals.

2. Implement, enforce, police - the board needs to require a progress check of policy implementation.

3. Evaluate-revise - Ask: Is the policy working? Does it help? Is it solving or creating problems?

Remember: Policy development is a process - not a project!

Here are some things to think about:

Policies are the scar tissue of the organization's past mistakes. Most policy manuals are never looked at until there is a problem. Then we ask, how do we get out of this mess?

Policies are developed by bright, well-meaning people who are trying to help with a problem - and they come up with pages and pages of good, highly developed rules and regulations. However, over a long period of time, a "big" policy manual can create an absolutely insane situation.

As administrators, we must enforce the policies whether we like them or not. Policies should work for the school - not against. (Brodinsky, 1977)

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES DEVELOPMENT

Each administrator has an obligation to the Board of Trustees to develop a set of policies and procedures that will stand against an administrative or judicial challenge. Remarkably, many court cases are filed because the organization has not followed its own policies.

Proposed policies should be carefully prepared by the administration and then reviewed by the institution's attorney before they are presented to the Board of Trustees. Board policy should be broad and should serve as the basis for more detailed administrative procedures for implementation. With rules being altered frequently, it is incumbent upon the administrator to stay abreast not only of the district's policies but also those of outside agencies.

The policies adopted by the board of education should be clear and

concise. The process of developing proposed policies should be designed so that departmental policies and procedures are in harmony with board policies. Policy development can often be enhanced by employment of outside consultants through such organizations as the National School Board Association, and state school boards. Initiating, editing, and advising on matters of policy do not encompass management's total responsibility for policy. Policies and procedures, to be properly understood and interpreted, must be communicated to the staff regularly and explicitly. (Harris, 1979).

In recent years there appears to be a trend toward increasing faculty influence upon policy-making. Most administrators feel that policy will be more effective if those who may eventually implement it are involved in the process. However, it must be understood that administrators perform functions which cannot be carried out by faculty members. The size and complexity of the educational enterprise is such that the making of policy and its implementation requires the full-time attention of highly specialized individuals with experience relevant to the tasks being performed. Competence in a subject matter field does not necessarily insure competence in a specialized administrative role. Although it is true that too much policy formulation proceeds in piecemeal fashion without comprehensive consideration of the educational program, faculty control of policy-making might encourage inefficiency, instability, and time-lag, which undermines the over-all educational effort of the institution.

The other side of the coin shows that faculty participation in educational policy-making encourages the recruitment and retention of highly qualified faculty members. Administrators should realize that it is important to involve those who will be affected by a policy change in its' development. This involvement almost guarantees acceptance and support of the new policy. (Blocker, 1965)

Board relationships are essential to the continuing health of the organization, and effective individuals with clear responsibility for policy development must constantly provide a bridge between the college and the communities it serves. Therefore, policies must be developed that are acceptable to many publics. (Blocker, 1965)

In some instances, the board finds that there is confusion about the role of the administrator and its own role. If there is no easy distinction between policy determination and administrative functions, then, the setting for

confusion between the role of the board and the role of the executive is clearly established. At the same time, if board members are being encouraged by their community constituents actually to "run" the school, or if board members take their legal prerogatives literally, but they may not operate in the best interests of the college. The board-administrator relationship has to be nurtured by good will and faith on both sides. Partnership begins with dispelling or at least recognizing the fact that role confusion can exist at times.

Administrators would do well to realize that a dominant board member may readily accept a general statement of policy; yet, in the actual implementation of policy, the board member may continually resist approving administrative recommendations. An administration with a great need for dominance will not only accept the authority delegated to him by the Board, but actually seek even more authority. There is, of course, the other type of administrator -- the executive whose need for deference is so great that they cannot assume the decision-making role which most administrative posts demand: thus, yielding organizational policy useless. (Getzels, 1968)

The American Association of School Administrators (1971) has issued a caution on policies: "Board of Education rules and regulations should not be confused with operational policies and procedures. The former are guidelines; the latter are more specific and carry out the spririt and intent of the general board policy or regulation." The line between board policy and administrative regulation has been debated for years, but each educational organization must come to terms with the distinction between the two. Whatever the final conclusion, administrators have a responsibility to support the development of policy and to initiate the development of regulations. Organized, clear, and succinct policies and procedures are essential to efficient organizational operation.

Few energetic administrators get excited about the administration of rules and regulations. However, the best-written and organized policies and procedures are reduced to no value when they are administered ineptly. An administration places themselves somewhere on a continuum ranging from the classic bureaucrat checking every jot and tittle to the languid administrator who lets justice escape through careless reliance on written guides. Although guidelines cannot be produced to meet every eventuality and the wisdom of Solomon is beyond the reach of most, judicious administration of written policies

and procedures is a goal worthy of any administrative officer.

To summarize the position paper -

A policy is a general statement of intent to act in a particular manner when confronted with a given situation or to achieve a given result at some future point in time. A policy statement represents a guideline to future courses of action to be pursued to ensure consistency and fairness. Policy making is the most important function assigned to a governing board. Policy statements are the means through which a board expresses and maintains control. Policies written, published and disseminated to the public inform persons relating to the board as to the likely disposition of an issue covered by a policy statement.

A policy statement as a rational guide to future action is phrased usually in broad enough terms to include all issues likely to be involved, but at the same time is specific enough to apply to a particular situation.

Rules and regulations grow out of and should be consistent with announced policies. A policy does not stipulate the strategy to be pursued to achieve objectives; it points the general direction. However, a clear-cut distinction between a policy and a rule or regulation is not possible.

The development of a well-defined policy is no simple task. It requires discipline, considerable debate and discussion, and much time. On occasion the value of policy formulation may be questioned in view of the time and effort required. Most authorities agree that written statements of policy are essential to effective administration, particularly in complex institutions and in turbulent times. Without them boards may encounter considerable criticism. Policies are valuable because:

1. They help clarify responsibilities among board, administrative staff, teaching staff, and community.
2. They help promote more consistent and prudent decision making or, stated negatively, they minimize embarrassing inconsistencies in board action.
3. They provide continuity of action.
4. They can save the board time, money, and effort, for many specific questions deal with similar principles, that is, repeat themselves in a variety of forms, and therefore can be handled in a manner suggested by a single policy.
5. They help improve public relations.
6. They help reduce pressure on the board from special-interest pleaders.
7. They help reduce criticism of board action when it becomes apparent to the community that board decisions are based on well-defined and consistent policies rather than on expediency.

8. They give the board a sense of direction.
9. They facilitate orderly review of board and administrative practices.
10. They ensure a better-informed board and staff.

There is not one best way of developing a set of written policy statements for all organizations. The steps recommended by the American Association of School Administrators and the National School Boards Association are as follows:

1. List problems that should be solved: This includes difficulties that seem to demand a large portion of the board's time during regular meetings.
2. Review the minute book: Often records of previous decisions taken by the board shed light on items that should be included in statements of written policy.
3. Study what other boards have done: This does not imply that one board can successfully adopt in toto the policy statements of another, but policy practices of other boards can be a valuable source of ideas.
4. Consult studies and writings concerned with policy development.
5. Check established practices: Traditions of the school which were never reduced to writing previously can inspire policies.
6. Solicit suggestions from the administrative staff.

Conditions that prompted development of some policies will change and trigger new concerns or demand a new priority schedule. Policies are dynamic and should be revised to keep abreast of the times. The process of formulating, reviewing, editing, revising, or deleting policies is continuous. Some boards set definite dates or times, such as once a year, to review policies and consider what revisions are necessary in the light of experience. If policies are to be a means by which the board can more effectively discharge its responsibilities, rather than a device that unduly restricts board deliberations, they must be flexible. (Knezevich, 1975)

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DEFINITION OF POLICY

POLICY - A GUIDE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF AFFAIRS: MANAGEMENT OR PROCEDURE BASED PRIMARILY ON MATERIAL INTEREST; A DEFINITE COURSE OR METHOD OF ACTION SELECTED FROM AMONG ALTERNATIVES AND IN LIGHT OF GIVEN CONDITIONS TO GUIDE AND DETERMINE PRESENT AND FUTURE DECISIONS; A HIGH LEVEL OVERALL PLAN EMBRACING THE GENERAL GOALS AND ACCEPTABLE PROCEDURES OF AN ORGANIZATIONAL BODY.

GENERAL POLICY AREAS

1. PERSONNEL
2. INSTRUCTION
3. STUDENT SERVICES
4. GENERAL ADMINISTRATION
5. BOARD-ADMINISTRATION RELATIONS
6. BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
7. FACILITIES
8. COMMUNITY RELATIONS
9. BOARD ORGANIZATION
10. ETC.

STEPS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SCHOOL BOARD POLICY

1. GENERALLY STARTED WITH AN IDEA OR NEED.

2. BOARD INSTRUCTS THE ADMINISTRATION TO RESEARCH THE AREA, LOOK AT THE LITERATURE, LAW, RESEARCH, WHAT OTHER COLLEGES ARE DOING. REPORT BACK TO THEM.

3. WRITE OUT A SAMPLE POLICY -- OR MODIFY ANOTHER COLLEGE'S POLICY IN SAME AREA.

4. OBTAIN INPUT FROM MANY SOURCES - FACULTY, STUDENTS, PARENTS.

5. COMPLEX ISSUE MIGHT REQUIRE A PUBLIC HEARING.

6. MAY NEED A SPECIAL BOARD MEETING TO DEAL ONLY WITH THE POLICY AT HAND.

7. BOARD MEMBERS MUST PUT THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS (AND THOSE OF THE COMMUNITY) INTO ACTION.

8. THEN EDIT, REVISE, EDIT, REVISE UNTIL IT IS RIGHT.

9. THEN ADOPT!

SHOULD WE STOP HERE? NO!

1. INFORM, PUBLICIZE, DISSEMINATE -- LET THE PEOPLE OF WHOM THIS POLICY WILL DIRECTLY EFFECT KNOW ABOUT IT. PASS OUT COPIES TO BE PLACED IN LOOSE-LEAF POLICY MANUALS.

2. IMPLEMENT, ENFORCE, POLICE - THE BOARD NEEDS TO REQUIRE A PROGRESS CHECK OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION.

3. EVALUATE-REVISE - ASK: IS THE POLICY WORKING? DOES IT HELP? IS IT SOLVING OR CREATING PROBLEMS?

REMEMBER: POLICY DEVELOPMENT IS A PROCESS - NOT A PROJECT!

VALUE OF POLICY

1. THEY HELP CLARIFY RESPONSIBILITIES AMONG BOARD, ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF, TEACHING STAFF, AND COMMUNITY.
2. THEY HELP PROMOTE MORE CONSISTENT AND PRUDENT DECISION MAKING OR, STATED NEGATIVELY, THEY MINIMIZE EMBARRASSING INCONSISTENCIES IN SCHOOL-BOARD ACTION.
3. THEY PROVIDE CONTINUITY OF ACTION.
4. THEY CAN SAVE THE BOARD TIME, MONEY, AND EFFORT, FOR MANY SPECIFIC QUESTIONS DEAL WITH SIMILAR PRINCIPLES, THAT IS, REPEAT THEMSELVES IN A VARIETY OF FORMS, AND THEREFORE CAN BE HANDLED IN A MANNER SUGGESTED BY A SINGLE POLICY.
5. THEY HELP IMPROVE PUBLIC RELATIONS.
6. THEY HELP REDUCE PRESSURE ON THE BOARD FROM SPECIAL-INTEREST PLEADERS.
7. THEY HELP REDUCE CRITICISM OF BOARD ACTION WHEN IT BECOMES APPARENT TO THE COMMUNITY THAT BOARD DECISIONS ARE BASED ON WELL-DEFINED AND CONSISTENT POLICIES RATHER THAN ON EXPEDIENCY.
8. THEY GIVE THE BOARD A SENSE OF DIRECTION.
9. THEY FACILITATE ORDERLY REVIEW OF BOARD AND ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES.
10. THEY ENSURE A BETTER-INFORMED BOARD AND STAFF.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

1. LIST PROBLEMS THAT SHOULD BE SOLVED: THIS INCLUDES DIFFICULTIES THAT SEEM TO DEMAND A LARGE PORTION OF THE BOARD'S TIME DURING REGULAR MEETINGS.

2. REVIEW THE MINUTE BOOK: OFTEN RECORDS OF PREVIOUS DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE BOARD SHED LIGHT ON ITEMS THAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN STATEMENTS OF WRITTEN POLICY.

3. STUDY WHAT OTHER BOARDS HAVE DONE: THIS DOES NOT IMPLY THAT ONE BOARD CAN SUCCESSFULLY ADOPT IN TOTO THE POLICY STATEMENTS OF ANOTHER, BUT POLICY PRACTICES OF OTHER BOARDS CAN BE A VALUABLE SOURCE OF IDEAS.

4. CONSULT STUDIES AND WRITINGS CONCERNED WITH POLICY DEVELOPMENT.

5. CHECK ESTABLISHED PRACTICES: TRADITIONS OF THE SCHOOL WHICH WERE NEVER REDUCED TO WRITING PREVIOUSLY CAN INSPIRE POLICIES.

6. SOLICIT SUGGESTIONS FROM THE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF.

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